Mand State of the service of the ser 10¢ MONSTERS THREE JULY 1955 **II**. ? The SCREAMING ROOM SWAMP HORROR REVENGE in SMALL FORM

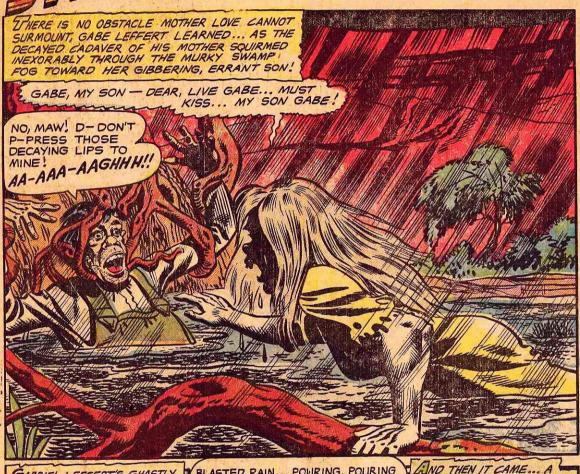




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MYSTERIES

SWAMP HORROR



GABRIEL LEFFERT'S GHASTLY
FATE HAD ITS BEGINNING ONE
STORMY, DISMAL WIGHT AS HE
WAS ABOUT TO LOCK UP HIS
PROVISIONS STORE ON THE
EDGE OF AN ISOLATED,
TREACHEROUS LOUISIANA
SWAMP...



BLASTED RAIN... POWRING, POURING WITHOUT LET-UP! I'LL CLOSE FOR THE NIGHT... WON'T EARN ONE CONSARNED CENT IN THIS WEATHER. NOBODY IN HIS RIGHT MIND WOULD VENTURE OUT ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS, BLAST TH'



AND THEN IT CAME... A
MEASURED KNOCKING ON
THE RICKETY DOOR ... A
PERSISTENT KNOCKING
THAT CAME AGAIN, AGAIN,
AND YET AGAIN, WITH
ALMOST MECHANICAL





MYSTERIES





THE STORE. HE UNDRESSES ...

HA! HA! I SHORE GOT

I DID!

HA! HA

SCRATCHES ... YAWNS SLEEPILY ..

I'M YORE MAW ... COME BACK ... (HUK-KKK) ... FUM TH' CRAZY-HOUSE ... AFTER ALL THESE Y'ARS! DON'TCHA KNOW Y'OWN MAW, CHILD?

HE OLD CRONE'S SCREAMS ARE DROWNED OUT BY THE WHISTLING WIND AS THE SWAMP STORM INCREASES IN FURY ... TI

YORE MAW! LEMME IN! LEMME... IN! DON'T DO THIS TO YORE POOR OL' MAW ...



LIHILE, OUTSIDE ... HIS MOTHER STAGGERS AND STUMBLES, AT THE MERCY OF THE CRUEL













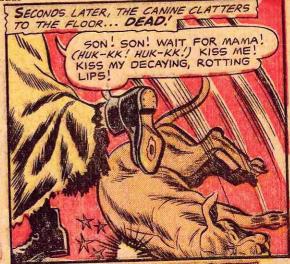


WINDOW ...



























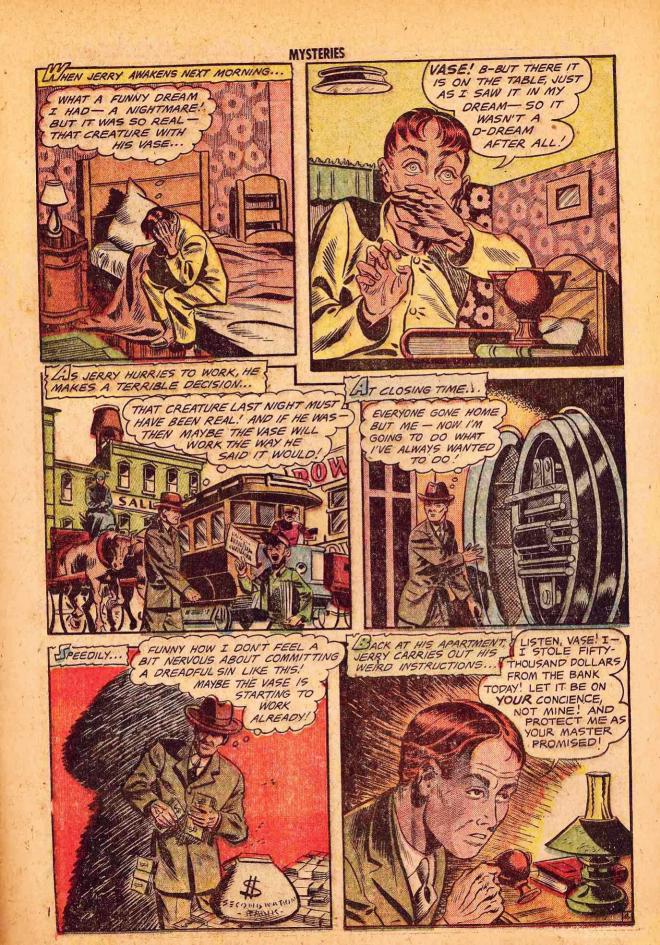






















I NEVER DID KNOW WHERE THE FOOL LIVED, AND I MUST KNOW IF I'M - (CHUCKLE) GOING TO TAKE CARE OF HIM AS HE DESERVES!



SO- HE LIVES IN
THAT BOARDING,
HOUSE, EH? GOOD!
I'LL HAVE SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL
TO WHISPER INTO
MY LITTLE VASE
TONIGHT!











GODDESS OF VENGEANCE

by John Martin

THE SCREAM of sheer agony cut through the large, domed room like a jagged sword. Then another came, followed by low, muted sobbing.

Behind the vast altar, dim, sultry lights hidden in sconces cast a blood-red, brooding illumination from end to end of the dome.

In the glow, the image of Kali, goddess of vengeance, of murder, of blood, of killing for the sake of killing, cast inscrutable cruel eyes over the dark-robed celebrants before her.

George Trowbridge shuddered; behind the mask he wore, a look of horror came over his face. He'd bargained for this; yes, money was worth any price — particularly if someone else paid. But punishment like this...

The man beside him stirred.

"You seem disturbed, Trowbridge," he whispered.

"I am," the other replied. "I—I know the poor wretch deserves what he's getting, but..."

"Mother Kali demands obedience in return for the gold she helps us earn in the world of finance," the other continued. "It is a small price to pay. A little blood, a pound of flesh . . . "

"That's no pound of flesh; that's a human being," Trowbridge shivered.

"Aye, but he joined The Crooked Circle of his own free will. He knew that Mother Kali would demand, sooner or later, whatever of his that would please her. He swore to surrender his most precious possession, whatever it was, in return for the magic of Kali's help." The man grunted, indicated the writhing, tortured wretch on the altar before Kali. "He's lived well in five years. Lived on the fat of the land, as have we all. When Kali demanded his wife's life, her blood, he refused!"

"But the punishment! It's cruel, painful, too much so!" Trowbridge protested hoarsely.

"His wife would have suffered no pain," the other said, his blank mask seeming to grin in the gloom. "Mother Kali is merciful in some ways. She would have gathered his wife to her bosom in the blessed sleep of forgetfulness. Of course the woman would have died, but ..."

A final scream stabbed through the temple room. Then the robed priest's redhot knife rose slowly. It fell swiftly. There came a hideous gasp for breath as the bound body arched toward the dome in a futile effort to escape. A shattering gong boomed the end of the ceremony.

AS TROWBRIDGE turned to go he glanced at the Goddess. Did she seem to smile secretly? Was it a trick of the lights that gave the stone eyes sinister life? Of course it was, he decided suddenly. He'd been a fool to believe the stories of the Crooked Circle, listen to the promises of luck should he throw in his lot with Kali, pledge solemnly to surrender, at some future time, what was most precious to him. True, he reminded himself, his affairs had prospered since he had entered the Circle some three years before, prospered beyond his wildest dreams.

But that, he thought, as he divested himself of his robes in the outer chambers, might well have been luck. He had yet to see any real manifestation of the power of the goddess. The temple, set in the cellar of a big old mansion on the city's outskirts, had been built with the labor of men, not magic. The image itself, reputed to have come from India, was simply stone. The rituals, the punishments, after all, were accomplished by the hands and souls of men, beasts, of course, as men could be, but with the outer mark of the tribe of Adam.

Silently, one by one, the worshippers drifted outside to the luxurious, well-guarded grounds. Trowbridge got into his car, started the motor.

An hour's drive brought him to the great bridge over the river into the city. He'd been thinking all the while. Sooner or later, he knew, Kali would demand her price.

His eyes fixed on the city's lights, Trowbridge felt a hideous chill of fear run through him. He knew he was not prepared to pay the price. It was too great.

Then, suddenly, he smiled.

He knew a way to cheat the Circle.

What easier way than to write the police, expose the whole ring? There was nothing, no paper, no single shred of evidence to connect him with the group. For that matter

it would be difficult for the police themselves to fasten any kind of guilt on any of the other members. But he could expose the location of the hidden temple, inform the police at some time when the group was to assemble, simply stay away himself.

The law would smash the Circle, destroy its power, imprison its members. Some would try to expose him, but there would be no evidence. He would not have been at the temple. And perhaps — he smiled to himself smugly — there might be a reward.

In the meanwhile, he knew, he looked forward to seeing his baby. Ron was at home, in his crib, attended by a nurse since his wife had died of heart failure, at birth time.

An hour later he was gazing down at his child. Ron slept peacefully, a smiling little bundle of happiness.

"They won't get you," he whispered softly. "I won't let them.".

In his study he took up pen and paper, wrote to the police. A week hence, he knew, the Circle would gather again at the Temple, this time to worship Kali, to invoke her blessing, to beg her to smile upon them with more golden fortune. In the letter he told the police all about the Circle, its promises, its rituals, its murders, gave the date of the meeting. They would raid the temple, he knew, find the bodies of the goddess's slain victims beneath the floor of the domed vault. He smiled, signing the letter with the words: A Friend Who Knows. Yes, he thought, there would be plenty of evidence after all. The whole Crooked Circle might hang — all except himself, of course. For he would not be there. And no shred of evidence could lead to him. Then he posted the letter.

The following night, a knock sounded at the door of the house. It was nearing midnight. The servants, the nursemaid, had been in bed for hours. The interruption startled him in the midst of a nightcap drink. He went down to the door, his heart pounding. Surely, he thought, it could not be the police! He had covered his tracks too well. How could they trace an anonymous letter?

TROWBRIDGE opened the door and drew a breath of relief. The three men on the doorstep wore no uniforms. The next instant he gasped in horror as the first of them gave the secret sign of the Crooked Circle. He fell back before them as they advanced, silent, fled ahead of them to the study. They followed, remorseless.

"You are a traitor!" the first intruder said, throwing a letter on Trowbridge's desk. Trowbridge went white. It was the letter he had sent to the police. "You did not know, of course," the other went on, "that the high police official to whom you sent this was a member of the Circle. A file of handwriting at the Temple enabled him to trace you. That is why we are here!"

Trowbridge shrank back, trembling. He was thinking of Kali's punishment, of what lay in store for him now. The other drew a gun.

"Get the child. He's in the next room!" he ordered one of the others. "Wrap it in a blanket. Make no noise!"

"No-no!" Trowbridge croaked hoarsely. "Not-not the baby!"

"Kali shall punish you both for your transgression," the other said, smiling evilly. "First, we shall take your baby to silence you, then bring it up as a priest of the Circle, depraye its soul utterly. Then—there is another punishment..." The man paused as his confederate returned with the sleeping Ron. The third man laid a bundle he carried on a chair, unwrapped it. A gasp of horror burst from Trowbridge's lips as he saw what it contained — a monstrous spider. His blood froze as he saw it begin to alter its shape.

"Mother Kali sends you this to replace your child," the first man said, sardonically. His eyes swung to the giant spider, watched it metamorphose slowly into a perfect replica of Ron. "You will not abandon it, Trowbridge, you dare not. Any untoward word or act from you and your true son dies! You will live with this changeling, year after year, knowing it is not your son, but a creature of Kali, knowing that some day, Kali will exact on your body her final vengeance!"

"Final—final vengeance?" Trowbridge quavered. He gazed at the monster hiding in the guise of his own son. It was exactly like Ron. He knew he could say nothing, to anyone. He would be branded mad.

"Vengeance," the other said slowly. "For on the day it has grown to manhood it will resume its true shape, sacrifice you to Kali between its claws of death! Come!" All three turned, went out, carrying the blanketwrapped, sleeping Ron.

Trowbridge began to laugh. His wild, insane mirth rose higher and higher. He was remembering the sly, secret smile of Kali, of the vengeance-goddess he had thought was just a lump of stone.







I DON'T SEE HOW, UNLESS WHOEVER MADE IT WAS ABOUT FIFTEEN FEET TALL! STILL IT LOOKS LIKE A HUMAN PRINT!

OHH-IT GIVES ME THE CREEPS, JACK!



BUT ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE PARTY HAWKS,

THAT PECULIAR FORMATION JUST TO THE EAST OF CAMP—I'M SURE THERE'S URANIUM THERE! BUT THAT OLD FOOL SMYTHE STUCK TO ME LIKE A LEECH ALL DAY, SO I COULDN'T TEST IT!





OTHERS YET, PAT! BUT I'M GOING TO
INVESTIGATE THAT PRINT—AND IN THE
MEANTIME I WANT YOU TO STAY
CLOSE TO CAMP!
DON'T WORRY!
I'M NOT GOING TO
GO WANDERING OFF
BY MYSELF!



BUT NOW'S MY CHANCE, WHILE THEY'RE

























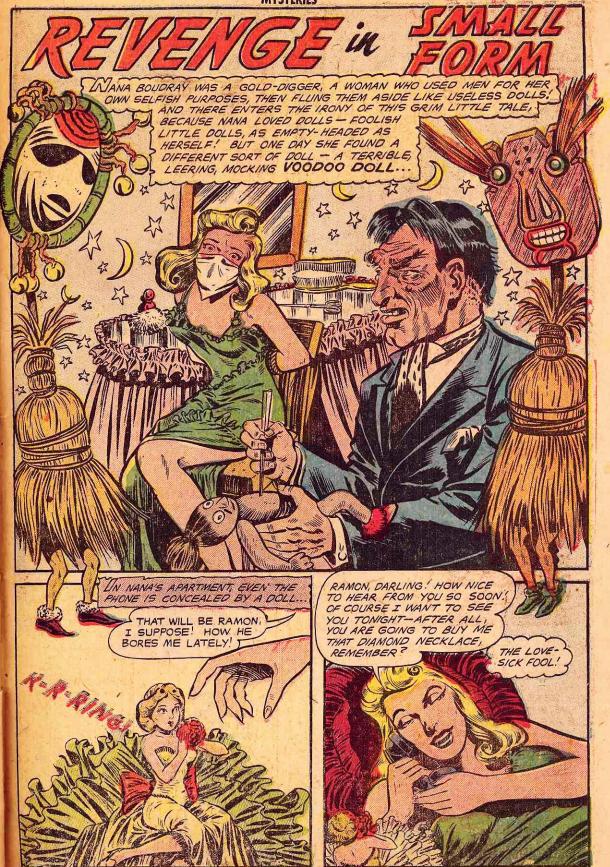














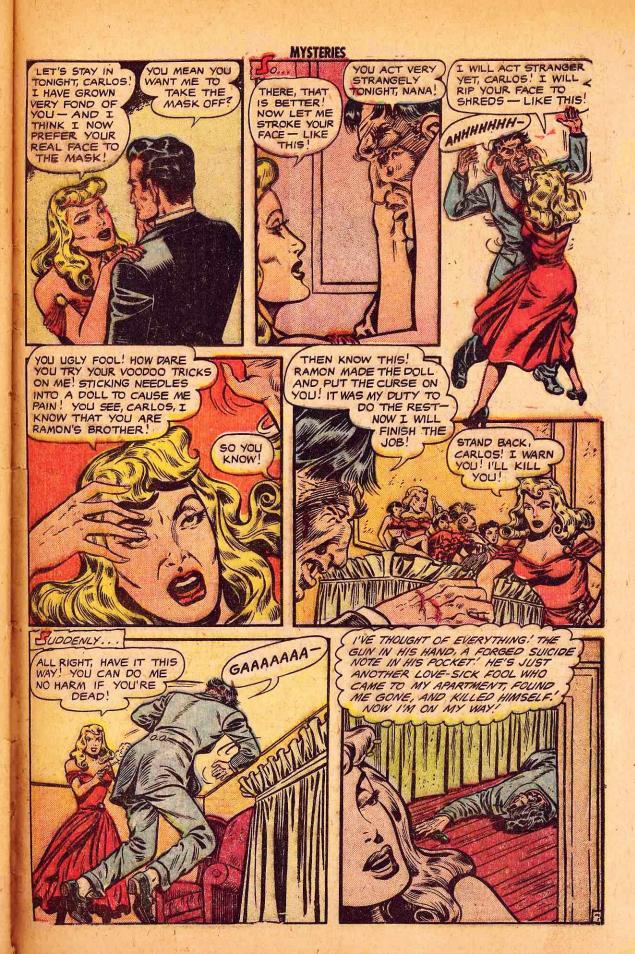














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